A History of Chilton County
High School,
And Its Feeder Schools

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A HISTORY OF CHILTON COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

AND ITS FEEDER SCHOOLS

by

Ivan F. Smith

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A Thesis

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of Alabama College in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

Approved by: Date:

Anne L. Eastman May 20, 1960

Charles L. Gormley

A HISTORY OF CHILTON COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

AND ITS FEEDER SCHOOLS

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Ivan F. Smith

PREFACE

This paper is based on a collection of data on Chilton County High School and its outlying rural schools.

These facts, to this writer's knowledge, have never before been collected in a single writing. Due to this reason some facts which were undoubtedly important in the development of the schools were not obtainable and apparently have been destroyed.

In any historical writing, one must depend upon the aid of others for information. Many individuals contributed small items both factual and interesting. These are too numerous to list; however, this writer wishes to thank Mrs. Vera White Griffin, teacher at Chilton County High School, for the storehouse of information she has given for this writing. Her co-operation, and that of Mr. W. A. LeCroy, Chilton County Superintendent of Education, and his staff, made it possible to obtain many of the facts for this writing.

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HISTORY

Chilton County is predominately a rural county, much the same as it was in the late 1800's. For this reason many rural schools, established almost one hundred years ago, still play an important part in the education of the county's youth. These rural schools act as Elementary and Junior High Schools serving their respective communities. The students from these outlying schools transfer upon completion of the eighth or ninth grade to the center schools or high schools and represent a majority of the enrollment of the high schools. For this reason the rural schools are known as "feeder" schools for the center high schools.

This is a study of the largest high school in Chilton County and its feeder schools, along with a brief summary of events leading to their establishment and growth.

This study begins in 1866 with a near-primitive school on the banks of the Coosa River.

Not much is known concerning this school which was named "Union Point" except for its name, the date

of its founding, and the fact that it stood and operated as a log school building for fifty years.[1]

However, this writer can picture the conditions of this early school as being much the same as schools following. Text books were few and simple; disciplinary action was harsh and frequent; split logs served as desks and chairs; heat was furnished by a log fireplace; teachers were ill trained and poorly paid; nevertheless, the pupils no doubt were much the same as today in antics and excuses for not doing their homework.

With the school at Union Point as a typical example of early conditions, this study will turn to Professor James C. Scott, who, on March 21, 1871, became the first County Superintendent of Education.[2] This is noteworthy because at this time the county was less than two years old and brings out the point that the people of Chilton County realized the need for an educational system early. With Professor Scott at the lead, the basic foundation of the county's schools was layed and has grown from a humble but sound beginning into the complex system of today.

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1. Records of the Chilton County Education Office.
2. Wyatt, Chilton County and Her People, p. 67.

Little information is available on the superintendent following Professor Scott except for the fact that his name was Professor L. W. Frazer, and it is common knowledge in the county that he did a creditable job as superintendent. However, the following article appearing in the Chilton County Courier, December 30, 1875, gives the reader a summary of Chilton County's early public school system under the leadership of Professor L. W. Frazer:

> "In order that the public may know what is being done in the cause of education in Chilton County, publication of the following statement is respectfully requested. During the scholastic year of 1875, there were 56 free public schools taught in Chilton county, with 1,385 pupils enrolled, and an average daily attendance of 978. Average number of days each school was taught 82. Average monthly pay of teachers $20. Total amount of public school fund disbursed during the year $3,725. From the above statement, it will be seen that the public has given 1385 children the advantage of four months education, at an actual cost of $2.55 per scholar. Can any system be devised that will accomplish an equal amount of good, with the same amount of funds?--Respectfully, L. W. Frazer, Superintendent of Education, Chilton County."[3]

Following Professor Frazer was Professor J. M. Cordrey who served two terms as superintendent. Up through Professor Cordrey's terms, the Alabama State law gave superintendents complete control over teacher

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3. Chilton County Courier, December 30, 1875.

recruitment. Examinations for new teachers were given at the discretion of the superintendent. One common story told concerning the hiring of teachers is the one where a man had broken his leg and was unable to farm. The disabled farmer applied to Superintendent Cordrey for a job as teacher, was given a contract written on an old envelope and permission to start a school. The man forthwith cleaned out a horse stable and started a class the following week.[4]

It is difficult to discern from existing records which of the early schools were public and which were private. However, available information indicates that these early schools were numerous but scattered.

One such school was the Clanton Academy headed in 1881 by Reverend W. A. Montgomery. This was undoubtedly a private school. The following article appeared in the November 10, 1881, issue of the Chilton County View:

> "Clanton Academy. Male and Female.
> Faculty
> Principal: Reverend W. A. Montgomery
> Assistant: Mrs. W. A. Montgomery
> The first session begins October 3, and will continue for nine months.
> Primary Department - - - - - $2.00 per month
> Intermediate Department - - - $3.00 per month
> Academic Department - - - - - $4.00 per month
> Board - - - - - - - - - - - - $10.00 per month

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4. Wyatt, p. 67.

A small incidental fee will be charged to pay for fuels, etc.
Tuition due at the end of every three months. Part of the board will have to be paid in advance. For further information apply to the principal of Clanton, Alabama."[5]

The next record of the Clanton Academy is dated 1892 when Professor Tifton Mullins became principal. The following is the newspaper account from the May 21, 1892, issue of the Chilton County View:

"Prof. Tifton Mullins will have charge of the Clanton Academy for the next session and proposes to do his best to build up a good school."[6]

Following this was an article in the September 22, 1892, issue of the Chilton County View:

"Clanton Academy, Tifton Mullins, Principal. Session begins September 26, 1892.
Rates: Primary - - - - - $2.50 per month
Intermediate - - -$3.00 per month
Academic - - - - -$3.50 per month."[7]

Another early school of interest was the Clanton University School founded in 1892 by Dr. Edward Young McMorries, Ph. D., who operated it for eight years.[8] He taught beginners and advanced students in Latin,

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5. Chilton County View, November 10, 1881.
6. Chilton County View, May 21, 1892.
7. Chilton County View, September 22, 1892.
8. Wyatt, p. 68.

geometry, and rhetoric. The school became one of high rating. Beginners of the McMorries school were taught by Dr. McMorries, the intermediates by Mr. Glass, Miss Bell Northing, and Mr. Scott. Dr. McMorries also taught Latin, geometry, and rhetoric. The school was located behind what is now the Willingham Hotel.

Mr. T. E. Wyatt in his history of Chilton County had this to say of the Clanton University School:

> "Clanton University School, under E. Y. McMorries, was a school of high rating for several years near the turn of the century. It was recognized by all colleges during its day, and many prominent men of the county received their high school and pre-college training under its able principal and teachers."[9]

There were many other smaller schools which operated during this period in the late 1800's. Even though they were isolated and small they each shared the burden of education and served well their respective localities.

After the turn of the century an apparent educational awakening of the Chilton County citizens occurred. It was at this time that the transition from small, scattered private schools to a more consolidated type of education in the form of community public schools took place. These schools' primary purpose was educating each

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9. Wyatt, p. 69.

communities' youth in elementary and junior high subjects. At present there still exist five such community schools which operate as feeder schools for Chilton County High School.

Among the first of these to be established was Pinedale School. On August 28, 1901, Mr. William Headley deeded the land for Pinedale School to Chilton County. The deed contained a clause which states that the land is to be turned back to his descendents whenever it ceases to be a school site. The building was completed in 1902 with Mr. V. J. Gragg as first principal and teacher. Mr. Gragg named the school for two big pines growing nearby. The building was a one-room structure located six and one-half miles northeast of Clanton. The first building was accidently burned by the clearing crew of the Vida Lumber Company about 1929. The company built the present building which has two classrooms and a lunchroom. Between 1902 and 1920 the enrollment averaged about one hundred pupils. At present, the enrollment is only fifty-six. In the early days it was not a graded school, but reading, writing and geography were taught. At that time older pupils helped to teach the younger ones. The school term was about six months in a year.[10]

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10. Records of the Chilton County Education Office.

The first building to house the pupils of Mount Pleasant School was built between 1905-1910. It had three rooms and three teachers with an enrollment of seventy-five to eighty pupils. During Christmas week of 1928 a small boy set fire to the building because he did not want to go to school. In 1929 the present building of six classrooms, with a lunchroom, was built. It had an enrollment of about 150 pupils in grades one through nine, with a faculty of five teachers. Some of the early principals were Mr. R. B. Johnson, Mr. Grover Harris, Mr. G. C. Weldon, Mr. Lambert, and Mr. Hudson Williams, the present principal. Mrs. Katie Duncan gave the land for the building, and Mr. R. M. Foshee gave the land for the adjacent playground.[11]

Between the years 1910-1912 Walnut, Providence, and Refuge Schools consolidated to form Concord School. Serving as the first principal and teacher was Mr. J. L. Wilson. Concord was born as a one-room school with an enrollment of sixty to seventy pupils in elementary subjects and algebra. This building burned in 1925 and was replaced the same year by a new building containing three classrooms, two ante-rooms, a library,

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11. Records of Mount Pleasant School.

and a principal's office. In 1946 this building burned! After two months of holding classes in the Concord Baptist Church building, old Civilian Conservation Corp camp buildings were moved to the school site and used for two years. We find the enrollment of Concord at that time was 215 pupils. The year 1949 brought another new school building which consisted of six rooms and the lunchroom. Several of the principals were as follows: Mr. J. L. Wilson, Mr. J. M. Parrish, Mr. Cleve Scarbrough, Mr. O. N. Brantley, Mr. W. J. Bean (who served for thirteen years until 1948), Mr. Earnest Coppoch, Mr. Albert Broadhead, and Mr. E. Daniels, Concord's present principal.[12]

The Clanton Elementary School building erected in 1911 also housed the Clanton High School until the Chilton County High School plant was built. When grades seven through ten were moved to the new high school building in 1915 the building of the Clanton High School became the home of the Clanton Elementary School, enrolling grades one through six. The enrollment of Clanton Elementary School in 1915 was about 180 pupils, with a faculty of five teachers. At present the school enrolls about 800 pupils, with a faculty of twenty-one

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12. Records of Concord School.

teachers. In 1922 four rooms were added to the brick structure making it a two-story building with a total of nine rooms. A temporary wooden structure built in 1924 was erected for additional classroom, but in 1926 this was torn down. The original brick building of 1913 was used, even though it was considered dangerous because of its weak structure, until 1932, when it was condemned by the State and torn down. The present building was constructed at this time and contained seventeen classrooms. In 1929 the first school lunch-room was operated by Mrs. Mary Will Bowden in the back rooms of the first floor of the old building. A separate wooden building was constructed in 1932 as a single classroom and is still in use. The classrooms used individual coal heaters until 1949, when a steam heating system was installed. In 1953 the steam heating system was converted to gas. In 1952-53 two additional classrooms were added in the space that had been reserved for an auditorium, followed in 1955 by two more classrooms, making a total of twenty-one classrooms in the building. Principals of the Clanton Elementary School were Mr. W. W. Monroe, Mr. W. L. Hicks, Mr. J. J. Pickens, Mr. Ira Pegues, Mr. J. L. Johnson, Mr. Walter Martin, Reverend Grady Williams, and Mr. I. I. Quienn.

In 1932 Mr. U. H. Abrams became principal and has occupied the position until the present.[13]

In 1925 the people of Maples Springs and Poplar Springs decided to combine their schools in a location midway between the two schools to get a more convenient arrangement for teachers and pupils. The present site of Thomas Junior School was chosen. The ground was broken in 1925 and the building was completed in 1926. The new building of four rooms had four teachers and an enrollment of 125 pupils. Mr. J. L. Wilson was the first principal and teacher. Some other principals were the following: Mr. Archie Harris, Mr. M. S. Smith, Mr. G. C. Weldon, and Mr. J. D. Hopper. In 1935 the fifth room was added, because the enrollment had increased to 160 pupils. A few years ago a lunchroom was added. At present the school has six rooms, six teachers, and an enrollment of 165 pupils with grades one through nine.[14]

The Clanton High School, built in 1911, was the forerunner of the present Chilton County High School. The location for the Clanton High School was the present site of the Clanton Elementary School. Grades one

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13. Records of the Chilton County Education Office.

14. Records of Thomas Junior School.

through ten were taught to those students paying the fee charged of $3.00.

The original five room frame building burned in 1913 and was replaced that same year by a brick building containing four classrooms with a large basement on the north side.

Mr. W. W. Monroe was the first principal in 1911, followed by Mr. W. L. Hicks in 1912. Mr. J. J. Pickens became principal in 1914. Mr. Pickens is noteworthy for his untiring efforts in founding the Chilton County High School. As chairman, Mr. Pickens headed a committee composed of Mr. E. B. Deason, Mr. W. L. Popwell, Mr. W. I. Mullins, and Mr. J. B. Brown, who together worked until they achieved the goal of meeting the state requirements for a county high school.[15]

Standardization of county high schools had become a state policy by this time. An act passed by the Alabama Legislature in August 1907 provided that there be a county high school in each county not having an agriculture or normal school. Under the terms of this act the people of the county were to construct a building, of value of $5,000 or more, equip it, and deed to the State the building, equipment, and five acres of

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15. Wyatt, p. 69.

land. The State in turn was to give $2,000 annually for salaries to the teachers.[16]

It was through this act that the present Chilton County High School was born. Doctors J. E. and A. M. Gowan donated the site for the new high school by a warranty deed fee simple to the State of Alabama.[17]

The building, a two story brick structure, was constructed by the J. H. Roberts and Sons, building contractors, at a cost of $18,000 and was completed in 1915.

As evident throughout this writing, fire has played a major and tragic part in the history of Chilton County schools. The Chilton County High School building of 1915 was no exception, for in the early hours of Tuesday, November 29th, 1938, the entire building, with all its equipment, burned, leaving $50,000 in ashes. However, the nearby agriculture building was saved, and classes resumed, utilizing it and the Clanton Baptist Church building. An entire year was needed to rebuild the high school plant, and in the Fall of 1940 a modern $89,000 school had been built and put into operation. The late Mr. L. C. Warr, Sr., principal at the time of the fire, summarized the burning as follows:

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16. Moore, History of Alabama, p. 732.
17. Deed Book 293, Page 40, Office of the Judge of Probate, Chilton County, Alabama.

"November 19, 1938 the main building burned with all the high school records. From this date to May 1940 we taught in the Home Economic-Agriculture Building and the First Baptist Church. We moved into the new building September 1940."[18]

In December of 1947 fire struck this building, destroying most of the south wing and the gymnasium, with an estimated $65,000 loss. The remaining school rooms were able to sustain the displaced pupils and school was resumed as normally as possible. Repairs on the damaged wing were completed the following year leaving the plant as it stands at present.[19] The original Agricultural and Home Economics building still functions at it did in 1915.

The men chosen for principals of the Chilton County High School are still considered and remembered by many as outstanding educators. Each had his part in the building of the now modern school system. Their deeds, whether small or great, contributed to the growth and improvement of Chilton County High School. When the new building of 1915 opened its doors for the first time, Mr. C. C. Slaton was principal and served very effectively for one year. Following Mr. Slaton was Mr. H. Clifford McDonald, who served from 1915 to 1919. Next, in succession, came Mr. S. E. Alverson, Mr. Ira Pegues,

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18. Letter to Mrs. Vera White Griffin from the late Mr. L. C. Warr, Sr., Clanton, Alabama, undated.
19. Wyatt, pp. 70-71.

Mr. J. J. Pickens, Mr. T. C. Stephans, Mr. Elsworth Ellis, Mr. L. C. Warr, Sr., and Mr. Patterson Hicks.[20] Mr. S. E. Waters is presently serving in this position. These principals were assisted by an able staff of teachers, too numerous to mention.

The curriculum of the Chilton County High School has been a thorough one from its beginning, insuring its graduates the opportunity of receiving the knowledge needed for their future endeavors. Additional courses were added as their need arose, which is evidence of the school and its faculty keeping pace with the times. At the founding of the high school in 1915 we find the following courses being taught: Mathematics, History, Science, Home Art, English, Gardening, Music, Expression, and Penmanship. During the principalship of the late Mr. L. C. Warr, Sr., courses in bookkeeping and typewriting, constituting a new Commercial Department, were organized, followed by an industrial arts course in auto mechanics and diversified agriculture activities. Mr. Warr was also responsible for adding a qualified agriculture teacher and home economics teacher for the departments he organized.[21] The year 1936 found, for

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20. Wyatt, p. 69.
21. Letter to Mrs. Vera White Griffin from the late Mr. L. C. Warr, Sr., Clanton, Alabama, undated.

the first time, a full time Physical Education Department, which had been added, along with a new Diversified Occupations program and an expansion of the commercial courses to include shorthand.[22] Through these efforts and improvements, the curriculum of Chilton County High School now includes complete departments in Mathematics and Science, English and Foreign Languages, Social Science, Commercial, Diversified Occupations, and Physical Education.

It is apparent the faculties of Chilton County High School from its founding to the present have been unselfish in using their spare time to sponsor various student organizations. In 1915 the school had two literary societies: "Websterian" for boys and "Hypatia" for girls. In 1917 the first student year book, entitled "Chilton County High School Cantrolla," was printed. In the decade of the thirties several other organizations appeared. Among these were the National Beta Club in 1934,[23] the Future Homemakers of America, Future Farmers of America, and Diversified Occupations Club, which are functioning efficiently at the present time. In addition to the above mentioned organizations,

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22. Letter to Mrs. Vera White Griffin from Mr. Patterson Hicks, Clanton, Alabama, dated January 21, 1956.

23. Letter to Mrs. Vera White Griffin from the late Mr. L. C. Warr, Sr., Clanton, Alabama, undated.

the following clubs are in operation at present: Glee Club (first organized in 1945), Science Club, Audio Visual Club, Future Teachers of America, "C" Club, Key Club, and 4-H Club.

"All work and no play" has not been a complaint among past graduates of Chilton County High School. The city of Clanton is a sports minded community, and the feeling was present when the high school was first built. The school contained both a Boys' and Girls' Athletic Association, which featured various teams and games consisting of both boys and girls. Mr. L. C. Warr, Sr., had the following to say in his letter concerning the sports program during his terms as principal:

> "Varsity high school football, basketball, and baseball were organized...along with an athletic program suitable for all in school."[24]

Furthermore, in 1940, the football field was improved and fully lighted for night games.[25]

Team games for the girls, such as volley ball, basketball, and soft ball, are offered during their physical education period.

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24. Letter to Mrs. Vera White Griffin from the late Mr. L. C. Warr, Sr., Clanton, Alabama, undated.

25. Letter to Mrs. Vera White Griffin from Mr. Patterson Hicks, Clanton, Alabama, dated January 21, 1956.

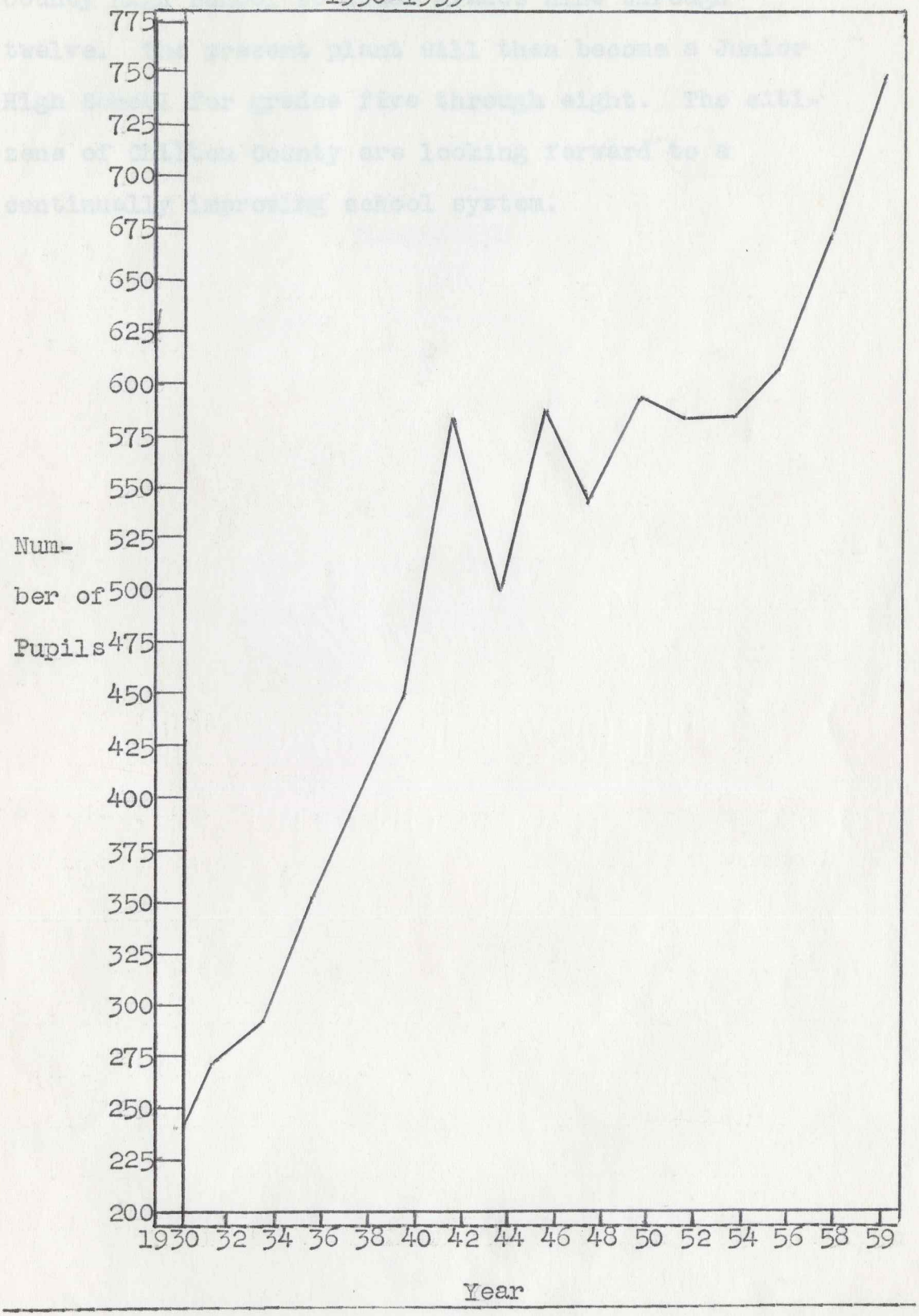
One has but to look at the trophy case in the principal's office to realize the standard the students reached in sports. At present the school has varsity football, basketball, and baseball.

Despite the fact that the population of Chilton County has declined as a whole, the enrollment of the high school has steadily climbed to its present, somewhat overcrowded condition, of approximately 762 students. The graph (see page 19), denotes a sharp rise in the thirties, with a slight fall during the 1941-1943 World War II period, only to begin a steady rise to its present enrollment, attributed to the booming crop of "war babies" and the fact that more parents in the rural sections surrounding the high school are bypassing the feeder schools to send their children to Chilton County High School when they reach the seventh year. This, of course, has resulted in a crowded situation, forcing the school to use basement and music rooms for classrooms.

Even though this may seem a grave condition, it has its brighter side. In 1959, the citizens of Chilton County voted upon themselves an additional local one cent sales tax for the expressed purpose of improving and building new schools. At this writing, plans are under way for chosing a site and building a new Chilton

Net Registrations for Chilton County High School

1930-1959[26]



26. Records of the Chilton County Education Office.

County High School to house grades nine through twelve. The present plant will then become a Junior High School for grades five through eight. The citizens of Chilton County are looking forward to a continually improving school system.

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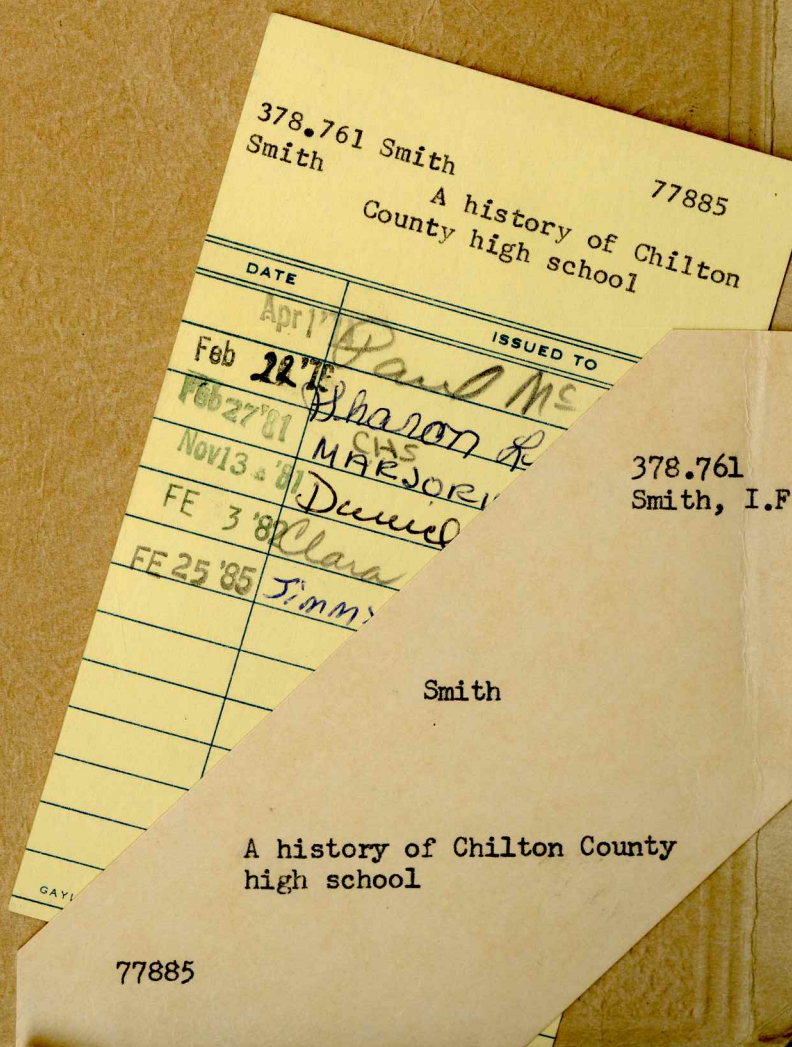
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